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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute English

### Have you ever seen a whale?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

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**Phil**

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Phil.

**Georgie**

And I'm Georgie.

**Phil**

Encountering an animal in its natural habitat is a magical experience. Have you ever seen an animal in the wild, Georgie?

**Georgie**

Yes, I have actually. I was on a walk and we saw a baby badger. It was on its own and it was really cute. What about you, Phil?

**Phil**

Ooh, the most impressive one I've ever seen is actually a whale. I was driving by the coast in Patagonia and you could see them in the sea.

**Georgie**

Well, that sounds amazing. And funny you say that because whale watching has become popular in many coastal parts of the world. But watching whales is very different from what humans used to do to: hunt and kill them for their oil and meat – an activity known as whaling.

**Phil**

Last year marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Whaling Commission's global **moratorium** – that's a temporary ban on the commercial killing of whales. Although Japan, Iceland and Norway continue to hunt whales, there's no doubt the ban has saved many whales species from extinction. In this programme, we'll discuss our past and present relationship with these giants of the ocean. And, as usual, we'll learn some useful new words and phrases too.

### Georgie

Plus, you'll find all the vocabulary for this episode, along with a quiz and worksheet, on our website: [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com).

### Phil

But first, I have a question for you, Georgie. You probably know that the world's largest whale is the blue whale, growing up to 30m long, but which whale species is the smallest? Is it:

- a) the beluga whale,
- b) the vaquita whale, or
- c) the pygmy right whale?

### Georgie

Hmm. Well, 'pygmy' makes me think small so I'm going to go with c) the pygmy right whale.

### Phil

OK. We'll find out later in the programme. Humans have hunted whales for at least a thousand years, starting with small groups of hunters in slow-moving wooden boats. Catching whales like this was often unsuccessful, especially big whales like blue and humpback whales, which can swim up to 30km/hr. But all that changed in the late 1800s, as Jayne Pierce of the South Georgia Heritage Trust explained to BBC Radio 4 programme Rare Earth:

### Jayne Pierce

Something happened in Norway in the late 1800s. A **chap** called Svend Foyn, who was a whaler – he invented what we now know as the exploding harpoon. And that was a **turning point** for the whale. The whale **couldn't stand a chance**.

### Georgie

In 1870, a **chap** – that's an informal word for a man – called Svend Foyn invented the exploding harpoon, a weapon for killing whales. This was a **turning point**. The phrase **turning point** means a time when a situation starts to change, especially in a positive way, although sadly not in this case.

### Phil

After this, the whales **didn't stand a chance**, meaning they had no chance of successfully avoiding the hunters. Foyn's exploding harpoon, added to the invention of faster steam-powered boats, increased whaling massively throughout

the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the point where over three million whales had been killed and many species faced extinction.

**Georgie**

By the 1970s, there were only a few great whales left and environmental groups like Greenpeace started the Save the Whales campaign to make people aware of devastation in whale populations and the cruelty of whaling. It became popular to listen to the Song of the Whale, recordings of whales communicating at sea, which sound something like this:

**Phil**

Here's marine biologist Joe Roman, discussing the Save the Whales campaign with BBC Radio 4's Rare Earth:

**Joe Roman**

People started thinking about whales in different ways. And then we have to **give a shout-out** to activist groups like Greenpeace, who put their RIB boats – they put their Zodiacs in between Soviet hunting vessels and sperm whales. And they were very **good at media**.

**Georgie**

Joe **gives a shout-out** to Greenpeace activists for protecting whales. To **give a shout-out** to someone means to praise them in public.

**Phil**

Videos and photos taken by Greenpeace changed public opinion about whaling. Joe says Greenpeace were **good at media**, meaning they skilfully used media outlets like TV and newspapers to convey their message to the public.

**Georgie**

Many whale species are still endangered and all whales still face danger from ocean acidification and plastic pollution. But the **moratorium** – that means the temporary suspension – on hunting them has lasted 40 years and hopefully will help protect whales for decades more. OK. Phil, isn't it time you revealed the answer to your question?

**Phil**

OK. I asked you which was the smallest species of whale.

**Georgie**

And I said the pygmy right whale, didn't I?

**Phil**

You did. Unfortunately, the answer is actually the vaquita whale, which is about 1.5m long.

**Georgie**

Oh, so cute! OK. Let's recap the rest of the vocabulary we've learned. A **chap** is an informal word for a man.

**Phil**

A **turning point** is when a situation starts to change, especially for the better.

**Georgie**

If someone **doesn't stand a chance**, they have no chance of success.

**Phil**

To **give a shout-out** to someone means to publicly praise them.

**Georgie**

And finally, if you're **good at media**, you are skilful at using media outlets to convey a message to the public. Once again, our six minutes are up but remember you can find worksheets, quizzes and loads more resources to improve your English on our website: [bbclearningenglish.com](https://bbclearningenglish.com). See you there soon but for now, it's goodbye!

**Phil**

Bye!

## VOCABULARY

### **moratorium**

temporary suspension of an activity

### **chap**

(informal) man

### **turning point**

time when a situation starts to change, especially in a positive way

### **(not) stand a chance**

(not) have a chance of success

### **give a shout-out**

publicly praise someone or something

### **good at media**

skilful at using media outlets, like TV and newspapers, to convey a message to the public